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AUTHOR Radziewcz-Winnicki, Andrezej
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes recent social changes in Poland and their implications for early childhood care and education, focusing on the creation of a progressive educational system based on the unified school. Key issues receiving particular attention are the problems of reorganizing the educational system, increasing students' learning effectiveness, incorporating new modes of curriculum innovation, developing patterns of political socialization, organizing educational research and its relevance to pedagogy, and creating new patterns in teacher education. The paper analyzes whether it is possible to create a new and progressive educational system in a short time. (KB)

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Andrzej Radziewcz-Winnicki
University of Silesia
Katowice, Poland

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Educational Changes - The Basic and Real Facts of Traditional Continuity in Post-Communist Poland

(Implications for Childhood Education)

(Presentation at the 8th European Conference on „Quality in Early Childhood Education"- Santiago de Compostella, Spain, 2-5 September 1998)

Abstract

Since 1987, researchers from 16 industrial countries have been involved in an international projects: „Childhood as a Social Phenomenon". Most of projects have been carried out on problems of implications for future social policy. This conference increases the topic of early years education, new challenges, new teachers. In the beginning of nineties, scientists of European Post-Communist countries joined to their western colleagues, trying also to solve aroused problems.

My paper contains varied and challenging situations and perspectives in the social field of education in Poland and social transformation in the last period. With that background I intend to describe the current situation in this Post-Communist country.

Presenting these thoughts, let me expect to seek new paths to further collaboration between parents, teachers, politicians and local organisations building new policies in the field of early childhood care and education.

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Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki
University of Silesia,
Katowice, Poland

Educational Changes - the Basic and Real Facts of Traditional Continuity in Post-Communist Poland

(Implications for Childhood Education)

The most striking aspect of the evolution of the debate on educational inequality in Poland has been the rapidity with which ideas have been diffused, rejected and modified. This has happened at all levels of the debate, during the last eight years, from the highly academic to that of the popular press.

The question, whether in today's Poland it is possible in a short time to create a new and progressive educational system based on the unified school which is democratic with unified education and the full freedom of choice is analysed in this paper. Educational policy has been taken up - in Western countries - in the background of political democracy and introducing market economy to the national transformation. When economists first began taking education seriously as a source of economic growth, they focused much more of their attention on the economic benefits of education. Their quest for evidence showed that, with other things being equal, more educated people had a higher rate of productivity than the less educated.[1]

In Poland the selection process - if we try to find an answer to the question: between school and job - for both educational and social life begins with the completion of primary education. The choice of secondary school is still a decisive factor in gaining access to advanced studies. Those who have the best chances of further education are secondary school-leavers, especially from schools that have higher standards than the others.[2]

In Post-Communist Poland the defects of the old economic and educational system were said to be still related to their ideological general orientation. The variety of educational reform proposals show that powerful and traditional reactions were indeed aroused. From the Polish press it can be seen that a lot of reform proposals fall into traditional expectations, barriers and stages given from the top and the bottom.[3]

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1 M. Carnoy: „The Benefits of Education". In: International Encyclopaedia of Economics of Education. Ed by M. Carnoy. Stanford: Pergamon, 1995, p.113.

2 Compare to : Education and Work in Poland. Ed by J. Kluczyński, B.C. Sanyal. Warsaw, 1985, PWN-Press: Unesco, p.51.

3 A. Radziewicz-Winnicki: „Educational Problems in Post-Communist Countries: The Case of Poland". In: The Role and Place of Humanities in Education. Ed by Y. Iram, vol. II Ramat-Gan 1995, Unesco-Press, pp. 805-814.

Education in Poland represents a dimension of national life in which certain achievements have been accomplished, certain objectives are yet to be achieved and certain important developments have led to open conflict. Below I offer only some of our own thoughts on what seems to me the main deficiencies of such approaches. I come to the conclusion which will not astonish anybody, that - from today's perspective - though education and economy have been very badly matched in Poland during the time of socialism, the implemented social policy in the domain of educational policy (i.e. the possibility of common educating, participation in national culture) satisfied social demands among the old generation. Intellectual characterisation requires that we still continue this old system. Such unity as various approaches to education have consisted mainly in the identification of connections and continuities between the educational system and the capitalist society. Education is said to reflect and correspond to reproduce capitalism. In Poland the case was different. Despite the realisation of the ideological aims of the socialist country the education was also open, showing - on a small scale - other possibilities of the individuals self determination i.e. life models. Can we call it as the educational pluralism of that time? It is very difficult to answer this question. In any case, one cannot say that in the past forty years it was only the reproduction of the ideological assumptions of the system.

It was a result of the specific relations between state and religion in the field of education in Poland. The situation in that country reflects the importance of the Roman Catholic Church in Polish history as well as its dominant influence within opposition to the communist regime after 1945. In the pre-war Republic religion, Roman Catholic or otherwise, was a teaching subject in state-run or private schools; after the war its officially regulated status depended on the changing relations between the state and the Church authorities and the actual power of the Communist Party. Following the education law of 1961, religious instruction in schools was finally abandoned, but the Catholic Church established the so-called catechetical points in their premises with the voluntary but quite remarkable participation of pupils.[4]

On the other hand, the issue and the role of intelligentsia is, to some extent, paradoxical. It may be seen that the phenomenon of intelligentsia as an element of social structure concerns only a few nations of Central and Eastern Europe, especially those who speak Slavonic languages.[5] As Professor Kwaśniewicz states, [...] "I would like to show observers from outside of Poland an image of the Polish intelligentsia that differs from the one prevailing in the literature on the subject. In some of these interpretations, the intelligentsia is viewed with a touch of nostalgia, as a narrow, elitist group that functions as the conscience of society and provides it with ideological leadership. Other interpretations intend to demonstrate that in a socialist society the intelligentsia occupies

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4 O. Anweiler: „Some Historical Aspects of Educational Change in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe", Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, 1992, vol. 2(1), p.33.

5 W. Kwaśniewicz: „Sociological Dilemmas of Intelligentsia. The Case of Poland". The Polish Sociological Bulletin 1991, No 3, p.169.

a special place in the governmental system, one that exerts considerable influence on the redistribution of the GNP and is therefore seen as a privileged social group. In my opinion, both types of interpretations must be viewed as one-sided and oversimplified. Therefore, I intend to provide a multifaced and diversified image of the Polish intelligentsia presenting both its socio-cultural features and social functions.

On the other hand, there are some epistemological difficulties linked to the theoretical concept of the intelligentsia as a structural phenomenon. In particular, one can raise questions about the character of the ties which unite members of the intelligentsia as a social group: whether it is an entity which can be labelled as an element of social structure, or if it is composed of loose categories unable, at least for the time being, to transform themselves into dynamic class-like groups influencing, in one way or another, different aspects of social reality".[6]

Now, in Post-Communist Poland, The Ministry of Education (still a separate independent power, and a main aim for all kinds of schools' considerations) contributes towards developing pupils and students. Officially it is said that now they are able to achieve the best possible extension to function in democratic society.

Let us quote official elements of Polish educational policy of nowadays (1990):

- Education should serve all and everybody - which means its democratic character. The access and universality of education together with the growth of the scope of these elements should eliminate limitations connected with the territorial distribution of people and all other barriers and selective conditionings.
- The high quality of the educational system is connected with the democratic character of education. We are interested in both democratic and modern system, thus covering schools and other educational institutions on high didactic, educational and tutorial levels.
- The indispensable condition of realisation educational policy is providing society with the level of education adequate to the needs of the individual and the possibilities of each person. It is assumed that in the nearest perspective all citizens of Poland should have a secondary education.
- An important assumption is the obligation of taking advantage of the commonness of education.
- Free education at all levels.
- School and educational institutions have to organise, as a consequence of educational policy, possibilities - through educational processes for the future satisfaction of individuals.

Problems of transformation of the whole educational system unfortunately have not been taken up.

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6 W. Kwaśniewicz : Ibid., p.171.

In the opinion of former Vice-minister Professor A. Janowski, "A basic problem for the Polish education system is material circumstances - building equipment, teachers, salaries, etc. It was obvious that, although the Post-Communist government understood the problems faced by schools, a radical improvement could not be expected due to the bad shape of the budget. The situation did not improve in 1990 and in the middle of 1991 became even worse. It should therefore be understood that the changes introduced did not address the most important one-budgetary resources".[7]

Let us now discuss a few priorities as the Polish ministry saw them. Political and social changes which have taken place in Poland during the last five years offer a timely opportunity to establish closer and more meaningful links between western and Polish educators than has been possible for several decades. The appointment of a new staff in the Polish Ministry of education, in the autumn of 1989, has inaugurated a new period in the evolution of the Polish educational system. This applies to all levels of education, starting with pre-school education and extending over primary secondary and further education. There is already a definite tendency amongst Polish educators and administrators to examine the aims of education, to reorganise the whole system of education along more different lines than has been the case so far and to introduce new ideas and new procedures.

In the public official discussion it is said that special stress will be put on the examination of the key issues of specific aspects of education which are currently receiving particular attention in Poland, e.g. the problems of reorganising the educational systems; efforts to increase the effectiveness of learning; new modes of curriculum; innovation and development patterns of political socialisation; transition school; work and labour markets; organisation of educational research and its relevance to pedagogical practice; new patterns in teacher education, etc.

In the autumn 1990, a new act was prepared and passed by the Parliament connected with higher education and all academic centres in Poland. The act grants the higher education institutions almost full autonomy to elect all authorities, design syllabi, determine fields of study and accept new students. Practically, the limitation of full independence and autonomy are financial resources. They are still inadequate and distributed among universities and other colleges by the Ministry. Since the autumn of 1989 the Polish ministry of Education also started work on modifying the school syllabi.

It was decided on a modern syllabus, which should prepare all pupils for their future function and role in a new democratic society. Having examined other syllabi and obligatory (until 1989) textbooks, the Ministry concluded that no radical and rapid changes were required for other subjects. Not all textbooks were estimated as too bad, moreover the financial resources were very limited. The Ministry of education decided

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7 A. Janowski: „Poland: Changes and Prospects". Educational Innovation and Information IBE, Number 70, March 1992, p.3.

that change would be gradual, extending over a period of several years.[8] The changes in education touched not only new legal regulations for primary and secondary schools but one particularly difficult issue.

Former school headmasters very often had been appointed because they satisfied the political criteria fixed by the Communist party. In June 1990 the Ministry decided on a one - time election of school headmasters. They allowed teachers to give a vote of confidence for the existing headmaster and/or to elect another. Another innovation is an increase of local communities, influence on their local schools. This resulted in the adoption of a new legal regulation under which local authorities have already taken over the running of kindergartens and on 1st January 1994 will take over the running of primary schools.[9]

One of the innovations, in the new political situation, was permission for the founding of a number of non-state school. In the end of 1989, it was decided that organisations, institutions or groups of individuals had the right to open quite private and/or other of half private called, "community schools".

Popular in Poland, "community schools" (in 1991 - 200, in 1992 - 600, at the end of 1996 - approx. 700) operated under the very general supervision of the Ministry of Education and were permitted to introduce broad changes to the syllabi. These are official projects and proposals of future solutions. In public opinion, in the social consciousness of the majority of individuals exists another conviction. It perceives that in Polish schools, since June 1989, we could see in fact only three important innovations.[10]

These are:

- inclusion into the school curriculum two hours weekly of Roman Catholic religion. These lessons of religious knowledge are taught and controlled by priests and/or nuns authorised by the Church;
- the Russian language (earlier obligatory) is not compulsory;
- increase of a new model of private and community schools in Polish society.

In all types of schools parents decide about pupil's participation in religious lessons. In secondary schools this decision belongs to individual pupils. In fact, nearly 90% of pupils take part in these lessons. Among that number, a lot of them participate only to avoid a low position of being an outsider in a social structure of the classroom. Introducing religion into the school without any public discussion since the 1st September 1990, might be seen outside the Polish scene as a first step to make the religious component part of many curricula, including also vocational education.[11] A

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8 A. Janowski: Ibid., p. 3

9 A. Janowski: Ibid., p. 3

10 There are of course a lot of programme changes especially in such a subject as history. Mostly, another type of interpretation of historical events in the 20th c.

11 O. Anweiler: „Some Historical Aspects of Educational Change in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe", op. cit. pp. 33-34.

limited number of English teachers in primary schools do not allow English to be obligatory one in place of Russian languages. So, however, Russian language is completely unpopular in Poland, about 80% of pupils in this school year attend lessons.
"Still, the law does not give the local authorities and teachers at individual schools the right to change the schools' curricula. The teachers have not got full freedom to use various methods. Fortunately, there is still an increase in the number of private and community schools. They have become a natural terrain for experiments and innovations. In the first two years (until 1991) approximately 200 schools of this type were opened. Despite being small and financially troubled, they are attractive for many teachers. They also showed that parents being active in the implementation of school curriculum, were also ready to pay for this new type of education. If community school implement basic and minimal curricula, it is to some extent subsidised by the state".[12]
At the beginning of 1993, there were 675 non-state schools. Among this number the majority of them were - as we noticed before - "community schools"(599) and more expensive for parents private schools (76). Certain stagnation or conservatism in education of the present days, as opposed to other types of conservatism may be defined as a conscious or unconscious tendency not to take into account in the urbanised society of the 20th century the essential changes of various social transformations.
It may also be expressed from the point of view that essential changes in the mode and way of looking at certain processes, which have already undergone detailed analysis, are not necessary. The American theoretician P.M. George distinguishes two types of conservatism: "passive" and "reactive". The main elements of the passive conservatism is, in his opinion, the satisfaction with the existing *status quo*, and the reactive conservatism means the fear or indisposition towards an attempt to take up renewed or new examinations or analyses.[13] It is also claimed that passive conservatism is connected with social prosperity and the reaction type of conservatism; it is always connected with the so called turmoil or simply crisis, as it is in Poland.
Critical accounts have not recently admitted even disciplines from the wide multitude of the arts. For many people it is necessary to deepen their relevant achievements to separate the true values from the false ones from those taken for granted or obstinately formulated aims taking only suggested shape.
Socially, the new problems of egalitarianism in national education touch also the problem of shaping the individuals personality in accordance with the educational ideals of a new socio-economic system and raising this postulate to the standing equal to other basic functions of society. These problems are strongly tied with the politics of local Poland. Let us quote Professor B.Jałowiecki's opinion, "The weakness of a political structure arises from the lack of clear-cut programmes. In Western democracies, programme options became blurred with the passage of time, but there political parties

12 A. Janowski: „Poland: Changes and Prospects", op. cit., p.3.
13 P.M.George: „Modele i społeczny konserwatyzm w socjologii" [Models and Social Conservatism in Sociology]. Studia Socjologiczne 1971, vol. 2, p. 89.

were able to create images easily discernible by the voters. In Poland apart from barely emerging movements proclaiming radical slogans or those raising doubts because of their past (Social Democracy of the Polish Republic, The Polish Peasant Party) parties on the local political scene are rarely identified with definite programmes.

As we already stated, local Poland is not homogenous, thus the behaviour of voters will be diversified. Political parties functioning on the central scene are not fully aware of this situation thus their programmes do not reflect the diversity of issues important to separate segments of society which is especially clear on regional level.[14]

The changes in the social formation in Poland are represented (inside and outside) as linear - a movement in a straight line, a progression, however, if we analyse those changes through an examination of different levels or tiers or components of the social formation - this perspective becomes rather more problematic. Very often that what is represented as a Post-Communist might have been seen accurately as a return to a Pre-Communist social formation. New elites of the real power, especially in local communities at the moment, are without intellectual support, and not enough educated people are among them, owing to their homogenous culture - i.e. a programme of perception, thought and action, increasing traditional values of ruling and working classes - create the cultural capital, with a lot of totalitarian tendencies. In today's Poland there may be found many similarities between Pre-Communist and Post-Communist orientation (i.e. nationalism, intolerance, idealism, individualism, hierarchical structure in social organisation, etc.). Thus the political scene of local Poland is poorly structured because of the amorphous character of social structures, weak associations and political parties which are still wary of each other. Egalitarian behaviour dates back from the time of real socialism, as well as a tendency towards revindicationism and authoritarianism and will dominate the political scene of local Poland for a long time to come.[15]

So, the end of euphoria. The development of mass education at all levels was going on in all countries of the world over the last decades. Unfortunately, here in Poland only 7% of the whole country population is experiencing by higher education, 21% are secondary school-leavers, and 70% present professional and/or primary educational level.

So, new problems for education arise: to conserve or to challenge the culture? This matter has already been discussed partly in local academic centres by the representatives of many sub-disciplines of educational sciences. It seems however that so far the voice of social educators has been quite modest in this respect. And it is particularly important where new and old educational strategies are suggested and reorganised, thus different, economic-social organisms are created.

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14 B. Jałowiecki: „The Political Scene of Local Poland". The Polish Sociological Bulletin 1992, vol. 3, p.165.

15 Ibid., p.166.

What encourage these considerations is the necessity of social sciences coming closer to practice, as well as the world-wide situation to a certain extent - which we also have to do in our country and which we simply did not want to accept and this is the crisis of the educating society consisting of the reduction of abilities and possibilities of educating the young according to the spirit of continuing the system of values, cultural models shaped by older generations and the past epochs. Summing up these critical issues in this chapter, I would purposefully like to avoid answering the question which may arise: whether and to what extent social policy - at the moment and in the future, in aspect of education in Post-Communist country, such as Poland - will be influenced by the Pre-Communist period of national history?

Thus, by rejecting the reforms hypothesis stated in the introduction of this essay we are able today to define a democratic political line for, or rather against, innovations in schools and not our life. Only the future will show to what extent can this become a reality.

Correspondence: Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki (Prof. dr)
University of Silesia, Dept. of Social Pedagogy,
Grażyńskiego 53, Pl - 40-126 Katowice, Poland

Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki
University of Silesia,
Katowice, Poland

Educational Changes - the Basic and Real Facts of Traditional Continuity in Post-Communist Poland

(Implications for Childhood Education)

Summary

In the paper I concern varied and challenging situations and perspectives in the social field of education in Poland and social transformation in the last period. With that background I intend to describe the current situation in this Post-Communist country.

There are some key issues of specific aspects of education which are currently receiving particular attention in Poland, e.g. the problems of reorganising the educational systems, efforts to increase the effectiveness of learning, new modes of curriculum, innovation and development patterns of political socialisation, transition school, work and labour markets, organisation of educational research and its relevance to pedagogical practice as well as new patterns in teacher education. Several of them are discussed in this paper.

In general, the question whether in today's Poland is possible in a short time to create a new and progressive educational system (including early childhood care and education) is analysed in this article.